

easily-remediable." It is within the power of the people themselves, by a little energy, to relieve themselves from these prolific sources of misery. Every effort to make them aware of this, and rouse them to the effort, shall have our cordial support and co-operation. We reiterate the axiom:—"We can be useful no longer than we are well."

REMARKS ON NORMAN SARACENIC ARCHITECTURE IN THE ISLAND OF SICILY.

HAVING cursorily reviewed the history of the island of Sicily during its occupation by the several powers who successively held sway in that country, and more particularly with reference to the Saracens and Normans, we proceed to consider the architecture, and the features peculiar to it, or from records of edifices once existing, of which accounts are extant, as collected from edifices still remaining. The styles which preceded that adopted by the Normans are only to be noticed as introductory to our examination of this more interesting and important variety of the art, although a more detailed account of the architecture of their predecessors than is compatible with the nature and design of this paper, would fully repay the attention either of the student or antiquarian.

For the sake of perspicuity, we divide that portion of the architectural history of the island of Sicily, which at present we propose to consider,—namely, from the commencement of the middle ages to the time of the Normans,—into three periods:

1. The Imperial.
2. The Saracenic.
3. The Norman.

1. With reference to the art during the rule of the emperors, no research can be made with any certainty prior to the middle of the sixth century. A manuscript, written by Integes, who lived A.D. 1648, preserved in the works of Mangitore, an Italian writer of eminence, renders an account, both curious and interesting, of a certain ancient church, which afforded an example of the state of ecclesiastical architecture during the period in question. A complete plan and description of this edifice may be found in a publication on modern Sicilian architecture, issued by two very able authors, Messrs. Hittorf and Zanetti. This unique monument of antiquity was destroyed in the seventeenth century.

The church, to which we refer, was erected by Belisarius, about A.D. 535, and dedicated to Santa Maria della Pinta. It was formed of a number of stone columns, connected by semi-circular arches, in the debased Roman style, and arranged in the form of the letter T. This form, according to tradition, was the original model of the cross. A roof covered the whole, but the building was uninclosed by external walls, and had the appearance of a finished construction of frame-work, open to the weather on all sides. The church consisted of a nave, with aisles and transepts. In rear of the transepts was attached a small building, divided into three compartments, which were devoted to the use of the chaplain and sacristans, and subsequently the centre compartment was converted into an apse, as we now understand it. Chancel originally it had none. A small garden or cemetery surrounded the building, and the whole was inclosed by a low wall, forming a right-angled parallelogram.

This is the earliest example of mediæval art in Sicily, and it is evident that the designer took for his model an ancient basilica. It is also more than probable that some of the materials of existing buildings, classic in their origin, were employed in the erection of this new edifice, a conclusion which seems justified by the style adopted, resembling, as we have noticed, the debased Roman art.

We find at this day, in Sicily, no examples of architecture peculiar to the three succeeding centuries. But a reference to specimens in the Italian dominions enables us to form a probable estimate of the condition of the art in the island. We have no reason to suppose that the style in the island differed from that employed on the continent, both territories having been uninterruptedly occupied for a long season by the same people, until in Sicily they gave way to the superior force of the Saracens. Records, unfortunately, do not exist, from

which we might gain any certain insight into the character of the buildings of this period.

2. The Saracens having established themselves firmly for some time in Sicily, erected for their own use mosques, palaces and houses, according to their own fashion, similar in most respects to edifices still seen in Spain, in Africa, in Persia, Syria, and India. In these buildings the pointed and horseshoe arch was very generally adopted. The dome and minaret, the honeycomb, mosaic, and other elaborate features and ornaments abound. The monuments which they found in the debased Roman style, erected by their predecessors, opened a temptation to the turbanned infidels, which even believers have not been able to resist. With materials ready at hand,—formed, it is true, after a fashion somewhat different from their own,—with no respect for antiquity, or community of feeling induced by a similarity in faith, or more ordinary associations,—with a religion, indeed, sternly opposed to that professed by the people whose extermination they came resolutely bent to accomplish,—the new settlers hesitated not to employ what they found, in erecting many of their buildings. The manifest discrepancies between the Roman workmanship and their own, served to exercise their judgment and skill. We consider their efforts to have been most successful, though we reflect with deep sorrow on their demolition of monuments, by the side of which we would rather have viewed their own rising. But, by this amalgamation of parts, they gave an entirely new architectural character to their buildings; so that in the edifices of this period, we find a style differing altogether from any other which had elsewhere appeared.

Although few examples of importance are now to be found in Sicily of the Saracenic period, traces of the handicraft of this people are still to be seen in every direction. Here a window or a door, and there some other fragment of a building, exhibits the features and principles peculiar to the Musselmans. The palaces of la Ziza, la Cuba, and la Favara, at Palermo, with portions of the Royal Palace and mosque of la Ziza, may be considered the most interesting specimens which remain. The scale on which these edifices were erected affords us a just notion of the power possessed by the Saracens, and the influence which these people exercised over the Græco-Sicilians. In design, they appear to have followed an oriental palace; in ornament, to have employed details peculiar to Arabian houses.

3. As the Saracens had varied their own style by the appropriation of Roman materials, so in just retribution for such sacrilege, the Normans, during their occupation of Sicily, modified their architecture with the remains of Saracenic art.

"In Sicily," says the late Mr. Gally Knight, "and only in Sicily, the Greeks, the Saracens, and the Normans were united; and by their fortuitous conjunction the Northern, the Classic, and the Oriental styles were blended together; the Romanesque, the Greek, and the Saracenic: nothing of the sort is to be seen any where else."

The completion of the conquest of Sicily by the Normans cannot be considered to have been effected previously to A.D. 1071. From this time they began to enjoy undisturbed possession of their newly acquired territory. But the rapid changes which had occurred in the island, the quick succession of one power on another, having each their peculiar language, laws, and customs, reduced the Sicilian population to a condition the most singular and remarkable. During the period we are now to examine, four languages were common in Sicily. The inhabitants were composed of the settlers under the Hellenic rule, of Orientals, and Normans. Greek and Latin were the distinguishing tongues of the older occupants; Arabic and Norman-French having been successively introduced by the subsequent possessors. Laws were published and deeds executed in three different languages; and the state prospered, notwithstanding this singular confusion.

"Tum demum crassæ magnum farragine corpus Crescere jam domitis solitis."

Christian churches arose, courts of justice and palaces were built, the mural inscriptions of which, whether sentences from the Scriptures or not, being in the Coptic character. On the coinage the inscriptions were chiefly

Arabic; while on tablets, paintings, and ordinary writing, the most fantastic license seems to have been used. Of this Babel-like confusion of language, many strange specimens are extant. Among these we shall merely mention one, in which the far-famed Norman King, Roger, is thus immortalized:—

Ρογερὸς Ῥγῆ

the Latin and Greek words and characters being used indiscriminately.

The larger part of the population consisted of the Sicilian Greeks; and of this class seems to have been chiefly the architects, sculptors, and artificers in general, whom the Arabians first, and afterwards the Normans, employed. This opinion is strongly confirmed by the appearance of Greek design in the works of importance; and it is generally admitted, that during the tenth and eleventh centuries, as was likely to be the case, the meagre remains of classical art belong exclusively to the Greeks. From this circumstance, in the earlier buildings of the Normans in Sicily, we may look for less purity of style than in those erected at a later period. The native artists, whom, with the greatest reason, we suppose to have been employed, imbibed, under the rule of the Saracens, strong predilections, which first corrupted, and eventually effaced, their decided attachment to the antique. They continued to use the ornaments in which they had been last accustomed, introducing them into such parts of the buildings as would admit of decoration.

Time, experience, and chiefly association with a people of a higher genius and more noble character than the Saracens, produced in the Sicilian architects a more refined and elevated taste. The main features in their buildings, especially in ecclesiastical structures, gradually became developed, the ornaments, modified and chastened. One improvement rapidly induced another; and every success gave encouragement to fresh efforts. In propriety of design, in a just application of ornament, and above all, in a true apprehension of the principles of decoration, they soon obtained great excellence; and at length their edifices began to assume that lofty elevation and sublimity of character peculiar to mediæval architecture.

In Nos. 190 and 194 of this journal, we placed before our readers two engravings of Norman doorways; in each of which, though they are late examples, are exhibited marks of the peculiar style, which characterizes the Norman architecture of Sicily. For earlier specimens of the pointed arch, as employed in the island, we may refer our readers to the illustrations given in the work of the late Mr. Gally Knight, to which we have already alluded. We would especially draw attention to the engravings of the church of San Giovanni dei Leprosi, erected about A.D. 1072; as well as those of San Giovanni degli Eremiti, of the Capella Palatina, and the cathedral of Cefalù, built by Roger the Second about 1132. These are all built in the pointed style, and are undoubtedly of an earlier date than any building of that character to be found in this country or in France.

In the first example we have given, we may notice the same peculiarities of feature, which the reader will observe in the specimens given in Mr. Gally Knight's work. The doorway, which we are surprised has never before been introduced to public notice,—like the rest of the examples we have given in THE BUILDER—is taken from the interior court of the Palazzo Monteleone, a princely fortress, erected about A.D. 1150, in the village of Favara, about seven miles from Girgenti. The principal features in the head differ materially from those found in buildings erected either in France or England about the same time. A thorough knowledge of the construction of the pointed arch is indicated by its frequent and even curious repetition. There is no appearance of the lancet arch, which was the first employed by our neighbours in France, and, subsequently, by ourselves.

The lintel and jambs are built of white marble, and are, evidently, remnants of some classical edifice. A chariot race is sculptured on the former; on the latter have been subsequently introduced various Christian symbols, some of which are difficult of interpretation. The hood moulding, of which a portion